

NEIGHBORS

Once a month, area deaf residents, their friends and family gather for a mass in sign language at St. George's Catholic Church, 3121 Sheridan.



Hands signal worship during deaf mass



This is the hand sign for "heaven," which was used in recent mass for the deaf.



The Rev. Joseph W. Roach makes the sign for "church" during his sermon to the deaf congregation.



Above, Roach greets one of the members of the church, prior to the service. At right, Peggy Melzo, center, of the Valley Organization for Improved Communication and Equality helps lead the signing during the service. Hymns are "sung" in sign language.

Every fourth Sunday of the month, a small group of the faithful gather at St. George's Catholic Church, 3121 Sheridan. Unlike other masses, only a few voices join in for the responsive readings and the hymns. But those present are actively participating in the worship service, using their hands to convey their thoughts and words. Most of the group are deaf or hearing impaired who have come for the special deaf service the Rev. Joseph W. Roach has been offering monthly for the past 11 years. Roach took a special week-long course in sign language at a school for the deaf in Milwaukee, Wisc. more than a decade ago to

prepare for his assignment by the former Bishop Francis F. Reh.

It may be the only worship service in sign language in this area although others offer sign language interpreters for the deaf.

"I'm still learning," said Roach. "There is an awful lot of goodwill on the part of the deaf. They tolerate a lot of mistakes. I try to make it simpler because many of the deaf have not been exposed to a lot of abstract ideas because of a lack of communication when they were younger."

Following the communion service there also is a time for sharing and sometimes a potluck lunch.

